

The Life of Christ Rosary (also known as the Carthusian Rosary)

Attributed to Saint Dominic of Prussia

Compiled and introduced by Daniel Frattarelli

What is the Life of Christ Rosary?

Saint Dominic of Prussia (1384-1460) was a Carthusian hermit of the Charterhouse of St Alban in what is now southwest Germany. Somewhere between 1409 and 1415, he composed a set of 50 meditations on the life of Christ which were to be added to each of 50 Hail Marys said using the Rosary beads.

St. Louis De Montfort in his *The Secret of the Rosary* relates the following on St Dominic's vision of the heavenly realities associated with the prayer of the Rosary:

“Father Dominic, a Carthusian, who was deeply devoted to the holy Rosary, had a vision in which he saw heaven open and the whole heavenly court assembled in magnificent array. He heard them sing the Rosary in an enchanting melody, and each decade was in honor of a mystery of the life, passion, or glory of Jesus Christ and his holy Mother. Fr. Dominic noticed that whenever they pronounced the holy name of Mary they bowed their head, and at the name of Jesus they genuflected and gave thanks to God for the great good that he had wrought in heaven and on earth through the holy Rosary. He also saw how our Lady and the Saints present to God the Rosaries which the Confraternity members say here on earth. He noticed too that they were praying for those who practice this devotion. He also saw beautiful crowns without number, which were made of sweet-smelling flowers, for those who say the Rosary devoutly. He learned that by every Rosary that they say they make a crown for themselves which they will be able to wear in heaven.” (*Secret of the Rosary*, no. 94)

The primary difference between the Life of Christ Rosary and the Dominican with which most are now more familiar is in the structure of the mysteries. The Dominican has 20 mysteries, divided into four sets of five, with each mystery meditated upon while repeating a decade of ten Hail Marys.

These sets are often prayed one set per day on different days of the week, so that over the course of four days one has gone through all 20 mysteries. In contrast, the Life of Christ Rosary has a total of 50 mysteries, each of which is prayed once in conjunction with the 50 Hail Mary prayers. Thus, one is walked through the life of our Lord each time one prays it.

Why should it be prayed today?

Like the Blessed Virgin herself, the Rosary is a means of bringing us closer to Jesus. Through the prayer of the Rosary, Our Lady guides us to her Son as we meditate upon key events in His life. The Life of Christ Rosary is in no way superior to the Dominican, merely different. It is offered here as an alternative to those who may find this approach better suited to them. Those who feel drawn to this method should be reassured by the encyclical *Marialis Cultus*, in which Pope Paul VI wrote,

“In concluding these observations, which give proof of the concern and esteem which the Apostolic See has for the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin, we desire at the same time to recommend that this very worthy devotion should not be propagated in a way that is too one-sided or exclusive. The Rosary is an excellent prayer, but the faithful should feel serenely free in its regard. They should be drawn to its calm recitation by its intrinsic appeal.” (*Marialis Cultus*, no. 55)

How does one pray the Life of Christ Rosary?

Hardware – These prayers can be easily said using the same five- or even one-decade Rosary beads on which one would pray a Dominican Rosary.

Software – The Life of Christ Rosary is a journey through the life of our Lord. At first, you will likely need to make use of a reference such as this to keep track of where you are along the way. Over time and with faithful practice, the mysteries will become committed to memory and you will find that you are able to move smoothly through the events without any written material.

Principles – The mysteries of the Life of Christ Rosary are inserted into the Hail Mary prayers, aligning what one is thinking and saying throughout its recitation. Pray the first half of the Hail Mary as you normally would, then add the mystery at the name of Jesus like this:

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, *Jesus, conceived in you by the Holy Spirit during the annunciation of the angel.*

At the time St Dominic composed these mysteries, the Hail Mary had not taken its current form and ended with the first

sentence as shown above. Thus, each recitation of the Hail Mary and its accompanying clause followed the pattern of bringing one through Mary to Jesus. This option is still available to those so inclined. It is equally valid, though, to add the second part of the Hail Mary after each clause as follows:

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus, conceived in you by the Holy Spirit during the annunciation of the angel. *Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.*

Please bear in mind that the goal here is not to get to the end of the Rosary but to draw closer to Christ as one meditates upon His life. As a result, you are completely free to pause on, skip over, or repeat any of these mysteries as you feel directed to do so.

Prayer with the Life of Christ Rosary in this sense can be very similar to *Lectio Divina*, in which one slowly, prayerfully goes through a text until the Holy Spirit calls one's attention to a particular verse or phrase. You will know when this happens, as suddenly a line or a thought will grab your attention in a way very different from everything else. Rest there. Repeat the line or thought as long you feel called to do so. The Sprit is speaking to you. Eventually, you may feel compelled to say something back, as this meditation leads you into a heartfelt response, or you may find that once you have dwelt for a while in the particular thought you are ready to move on. Either is equally good, as each is a gift from the Spirit perfectly suited to your needs at that moment.

In accord with his vision of the heavenly court, St. Dominic recommended that at the name of Mary one should bow one's head, and at the name of Jesus one should genuflect. Again, this is merely a suggestion.

The mysteries listed below are a compilation of two versions of this form of the Rosary which I have combined as follows, following St Dominic's instruction that his schema was to be taken only as a suggestion. One version is taken from Fr Johann Roten's excellent website "The Mary Page" (campus.udayton.edu/mary), to which the reader is referred for further information about Our Blessed Mother in general and this form of her Rosary in particular. The second is from a prayer book from Trier, where St Dominic composed these mysteries.

Text of prayers used in the recitation of the Rosary

Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Hail Mary

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Glory Be

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Our Father

Our Father, Who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy Will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Fatima prayer

O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell, lead all souls to heaven, especially those who are in most need of Thy mercy.

The Life of Christ Rosary, bead by bead

Preparation

Begin by kissing the crucifix and signing yourself with the sign of the cross, saying “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

Our Father bead

Recite the Apostle's Creed.

Three Hail Mary beads

Upon each say one Hail Mary, inserting a clause of your choosing related to our Lord and the virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity, such as:

1. Jesus, to whom we can always turn in faith
2. Jesus, the reason for our hope
3. Jesus, the source and goal of all charity

Our Father bead

Say one Glory Be, followed by one Our Father.

First Decade (His birth)

1. Jesus, conceived in you by the Holy Spirit during the annunciation of the angel
2. Jesus, who traveled together with you to visit Saint Elisabeth in the hill country, and whom John the Baptist recognized while yet in his mother’s womb
3. Jesus, to whom you, perpetually virgin in body and soul, gave birth with joy
4. Jesus, whom you wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger
5. Jesus, whose birth the angels celebrated singing “Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace to men of good will”, and whom the shepherds visited in Bethlehem
6. Jesus, who was circumcised on the eighth day and given the name which is above every other name
7. Jesus, who was sought for and worshiped by the Magi
8. Jesus, whom you carried to the Temple and presented to God, His Father
9. Jesus, who was lovingly received in the arms of old Simeon, and recognized by the holy prophetess, Anna
10. Jesus, with whom you fled into Egypt as directed by the angel, to avoid Herod’s persecution

Our Father bead

One Glory Be, one Fatima prayer, and one Our Father

Second decade (His youth and public ministry)

11. Jesus, with whom you returned home after seven years, when directed by the angel
12. Jesus, left in Jerusalem when He was twelve years old, and found in the Temple after three days
13. Jesus, who each day grew further in wisdom and grace before God and man
14. Jesus, whom John baptized in the Jordan and called the Lamb of God
15. Jesus, who fasted forty days in the desert and overcame the temptations put to Him by Satan
16. Jesus, who called the disciples and proclaimed the kingdom of God
17. Jesus, who healed the sick, freed the possessed, and raised the dead to life
18. Jesus, whose feet Mary Magdalene washed with her tears, dried with her hair, and anointed with her perfume
19. Jesus, who was transfigured on the mountain in the presence of Peter, James, and John
20. Jesus, who raised Lazarus to life after he had been dead for four days

Our Father bead

One Glory Be, one Fatima prayer, and one Our Father

Third decade (His passion)

21. Jesus, who was welcomed as the Messiah as He entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday
22. Jesus, who at the Last Supper instituted the sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist
23. Jesus, who prayed in agony in the garden of Gethsemane
24. Jesus, who, betrayed by Judas and abandoned by His friends, gave Himself willingly into the hands of His captors
25. Jesus, who, captured and roughly bound, was led to the high priest
26. Jesus, who was denied three times by Simon Peter and was falsely accused, mocked, spat upon, and beaten by the crowd
27. Jesus, who was scourged at the pillar on orders given by Pilate
28. Jesus, who was crowned with thorns, covered with a purple mantle, and hailed as king by mocking soldiers
29. Jesus, who before Caiaphas and Pilate was condemned to a wicked death
30. Jesus, who was given the burden of the cross to bear like a criminal to the hill of Golgotha

Our Father bead

One Glory Be, one Fatima prayer, and one Our Father

Fourth decade (His crucifixion)

31. Jesus, nailed to the cross under the inscription “This is the King of the Jews”
32. Jesus, who prayed for His murderers, saying “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”
33. Jesus, who said to the thief at His right “Amen I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with Me in paradise”
34. Jesus, who said to you, His Mother, “Woman, behold thy son”, and to John “Behold thy Mother”
35. Jesus, who cried out upon the cross: “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”
36. Jesus, who said “I thirst”, and after having tasted the vinegar offered to Him said “It is consummated”
37. Jesus, who at the ninth hour cried out “Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit”
38. Jesus, who for us, poor sinners, suffered a cruel and painful death. Alleluia.
39. Jesus, whose side was pierced with a spear and from whose Sacred Heart Blood and Water poured out for the forgiveness of our sins
40. Jesus, whose sacred body was brought down from the cross and received in your arms

Our Father bead

One Glory Be, one Fatima prayer, and one Our Father

Fifth decade (His resurrection)

41. Jesus, whose body was wrapped in a shroud and laid in the tomb by holy men
42. Jesus, whose grave was sealed and guarded by Pilate’s soldiers
43. Jesus, whose holy soul descended into Hell to preach the good news and conduct the holy patriarchs to Heaven
44. Jesus, who rose from the dead on the third day, filling you with incredible joy
45. Jesus, who after His Resurrection appeared frequently to His disciples and friends to strengthen their faith
46. Jesus, who, before you and His apostles, ascended into heaven on the fortieth day and was seated at the right hand of the Father
47. Jesus, who, as He had promised, sent the Holy Spirit to you and to His apostles on the day of Pentecost
48. Jesus, who finally called you, His dearest Mother, to Himself, placing you at His right hand and crowning you with glory as Queen of Heaven
49. Jesus, who wants to call us, His servants and yours, to Himself after this life and through your intercession, we pray, receive us into the joy of His Father’s Kingdom
50. Jesus, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and with you most Holy Mother, reigns triumphant and glorious forever

One Glory Be, one Fatima prayer, and one Our Father

Concluding prayers

St Dominic’s Prayer to Our Lady

Oh Immaculate, ever blessed, and glorious Virgin Mary, Mother of God; oh Temple of God, the most beautiful of all temples; oh Doorway of the Kingdom of Heaven through which the whole world has been saved, do hear me mercifully and become my sweet protectress, for me a poor and wretched sinner. Be my help in all my needs. Amen.

Hail Holy Queen

Hail, holy Queen, mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness, and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve. To thee do we send up our sighs mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and after this our exile show us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God.

That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Rosary Prayer

Let us pray. O God, whose only begotten Son, by His life, death, and resurrection, has purchased for us the rewards of eternal salvation. Grant, we beseech Thee, that while meditating on these mysteries of the most holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, that we may both imitate what they contain and obtain what they promise, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us.

Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us.

For the Intentions of the Holy Father

For the intentions of the Holy Father: say one Our Father, one Hail Mary, and one Glory Be

Conclusion

Kiss the crucifix and sign yourself with the sign of the cross, saying “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

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Available online at: LifeOfChristRosary.com

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